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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to establish the position of the Michigan State Board of Education regarding the humanities through a definition and an explanation of the purposes of the humanities within the schools. The humanities are most clearly identified with philosophy, ethics, comparative religion, history and criticism of the arts. In the K-12 curriculum, the humanities are most frequently taught in the social studies, literature, foreign languages, music, and art courses. The humanities serve the most basic goals of public education by preparing students for citizenship and work environments, as well as enriching and rewarding their personal lives. The humanities can free each individual to pursue in a reflective and responsible way his or her individual vision. (SM)

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A position statement on

Humanities in Michigan Schools

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Foreword

The humanities are an important and basic part of education. As a separate course of study, the humanities allow students to appraise and critically examine the works of mankind at its finest moments. Integrated into the broad curriculum, the humanities provide a context of human experience and ideas which give relevance to the facts and figures of education.

This position statement, approved by the Michigan State Board of Education on November 5, 1986, helps to define the scope of the term *humanities* and the purposes of humanities programs in the schools. Developed by a select committee of humanities educators, scholars from the field, and Department personnel, the statement provides a rationale and guide for schools to expand humanities awareness and offerings in the K-12 curriculum in Michigan.

With the publishing of this statement, the State Board of Education recognizes and affirms the vital role of the humanities in education. The experience and understanding promoted through such programs is an essential component to the development of complete human beings.

Phillip E. Runkel
Superintendent of Public Instruction

POSITION STATEMENT ON THE HUMANITIES

Introduction

The humanities provide an understanding and appreciation of human events and creations by promoting a broader and deeper view of one's sense of place, sense of community and sense of self. The purpose of this paper is to establish the position of the State Board of Education regarding the humanities by offering a definition of the humanities and an explanation of the purposes of the humanities within the schools.

Policy Statement

Success in educational achievement depends on curricular standards that provide students the opportunity to acquire the full range of understanding necessary to function in this pluralistic society. The State Board of Education is committed to promoting the implementation of *Better Education for Michigan Citizens: A Blueprint for Action* and such policy expectations as are found in *The Common Goals of Michigan Education*, the essential skills objectives in curricular areas[1], life role competencies, social and personal responsibility, and career education.

It is the position of the State Board of Education that local education agencies can effectively accomplish implementation of existing policies through the use and promotion of instruction and student learning activities in the humanities at all levels, kindergarten through twelfth grade. Local districts should adopt policies and curriculum guidelines to ensure that the humanities are an essential part of student learning objectives and school experiences.

What are the Humanities?

The humanities are fields of study which analyze, assess and shape the human experience and the intellectual and imaginative products of the mind and permeate all curricular areas. Their concerns are with the issues of love, justice, wisdom, beauty, freedom and knowledge. To study the humanities is to study culture and history, to read and evaluate philosophy and literature, to critically appreciate the visual and musical arts, to understand and appreciate the achievements of civilization, and to learn from others about what is important in our lives and enriching in our own culture.

The questions with which the humanities deal are found in all academic disciplines, but the humanities are most clearly identified with philosophy, ethics, comparative religion, history and criticism of the arts, history, jurisprudence, literature, classical and modern languages, linguistics, archaeology, political and social theory, international relations and cultural anthropology. In the K-12 curriculum the humanities are most frequently taught in the social studies, literature, foreign languages, music and art courses.

The humanities search for truth with a respect for the importance of individual creativity, freedom and a sense of the worth and dignity of human nature. They seek to answer the essential question of what it has meant in the past and what it means at present to be "fully human."

What are the Purposes of the Humanities in the Schools?

The study of the humanities is too often thought to involve merely the acquisition of refined tastes and the attainment of "culture" as a badge of social distinction. This popular image has unfortunately obscured the fundamental ways in which the humanities serve the most basic goals of public education -- preparing students for citizenship and the world of work, as well as enriching and rewarding their personal lives.

The study of the humanities, and the development of a reflective understanding of the whole of human experience, is the foundation for good citizenship that is not just complacent, but challenging and active. In addition, the skills and understanding developed through study in the humanities are essential tools for a life of productive work. Business leaders are beginning to recognize that today's complex work environment requires employees who can develop creative solutions to unprecedented problems.

A democracy that values the individual must aim to help each person fully develop his or her creative and intellectual powers. As cited in *The Common Goals of Michigan Education*, the humanities promote this development in several ways. The humanities provide students with a lifetime of alternatives to popular culture by introducing them to the greatest works of human thought and imagination, both classical and contemporary. Further, the humanities free each individual to pursue in a reflective and responsible way his or her individual vision.

[1] including art, career development, communications (reading,writing, listening and speaking), health, mathematics, music, physical education, science, social studies, and foreign language.

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